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Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Humble Power”

Text: Matthew 21:1-11 (Romans 13:8-14)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus enters Jerusalem, but it seems that there is some confusion about this . . . about Him. Some people greeted Him as if He were a king, throwing palm branches or the clothes off their backs onto the road in front of Him and crying out, “**Hosanna! Blessed!**” But others among the pilgrim-hordes descending on the city to celebrate the Passover looked at Him and said, “**Huh? What are you talking about? Who is this?**” You call Him a king, but He doesn’t look like a king, He has no guards or soldiers like a king, and He’s riding on a very un-kingly donkey. Two and two were not adding up to four, here. And so, Matthew tells us, the whole city was **stirred up** - either in joy or confusion.

How very much like Christmas in our world today. For as we begin a new church year, and as the calendar turns past Thanksgiving and into December, the whole world is preparing to celebrate Christmas. But it seems as if there is some confusion about this. For some people are greeting Jesus as if He were a Saviour who was coming and so crying out, “*Repent!*” But others among the pilgrim-hordes descending on the stores and malls to celebrate the start of the gift-buying season, are saying, “*Huh? What are you talking about?*” Your Saviour doesn’t look like a saviour; this is a time of joy, not repentance; and the “saving” going on *here* is of the 50% off variety. And so, it seems, still today the whole world is **stirred up** at Jesus’ coming - either in joy or confusion.

Why is this? The first reason is that little word Matthew uses to describe how Jesus came into Jerusalem that day: **humble**. And humble is a confusing word. For most people know it’s a good thing, but we still don’t want to be it. For humble is not the way of our world. Humble does not get you recognized. Humble wins no awards. Humble gets you overlooked at best, and walked on at worst. Therefore humble is not very desirable. There’s no advantage in it.

And then, if ever there was someone who had no reason to be humble, it is Jesus. He is the Creator of the world, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Almighty God who keeps the planets in their orbits, feeds all the animals of the earth, and sends rain to water the earth. He is the cleanser of lepers, the healer of

the blind and deaf, and the raiser of the dead. He is the Righteous One who will judge the world in the end. And for these things He should be exalted, shouldn't He?

And yet it seems He does not want to be known for these things. For very often, after healing someone, Jesus asks them not to tell anyone. And when they try to make Jesus king, He packs up and leaves for the next town. Why does Jesus do those things? Why doesn't He want to be known? Why is He being so . . . so *humble*?

Because truly for these things He does not want to be known. For while He is the Creator, and He is the Judge, and He is the Almighty, He wants to be *known*, rather, as the crucified one; as the king crowned with thorns and on a throne of crossed wood; as the one who laid down His life for the life of the world. All His other miracles were to point to this greater miracle: that in Jesus, God has come down to us, humbly, in our own flesh and blood, to be our Saviour. In Jesus, God has come to serve His creation by dying on the cross to take away the sin of the world, that in His resurrection He make all creation new again.

And so He is humble in His coming at His birth, humble in His coming to Jerusalem, and humble still in His coming to us today. For in answer to our prayer earlier, "*Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come,*" He comes to us today in the humble power of preaching, and in the humble power of bread and wine. And in these ways He wants to be known. Though we want grand and glorious, big and spectacular, for we think that is the way, it is not the way of Jesus. Not yet. He will be all those things at the end of time, but now - as then - He comes in the way of the cross. In humble power. To forgive. To heal. To raise. To save. To give us not just 50% off our sins, but 100%. And so humble is good. Humble is of God.

But humble is also for us, and so the second reason for confusion is related to this first one, for it is what it means to be humble before God ourselves: to **repent**. As with humble, most people know this is a good thing, but still don't want to do it. For repentance is not the way of the world. Most would rather ignore sin, excuse sin, rationalize sin, or glory in their sin and insist that it's not really sin at all. We do that. When confronted with our sin, the first word most often out of our mouths is what? **But**. But I had a reason, I have an excuse, I was forced, I didn't do it, I can explain . . .

But what we are explaining and showing with our excuses is that our love is all wrong. We love ourselves more than God. We love ourselves more than others. And all that self-love leads not to humble, but to pride and self-serving and wanting others to serve us - or at the very least, serve us by not bothering us.

That's why the humble power of Jesus is so confusing. The humble power of Jesus is not like that. In fact, it is the exact opposite. For the humble power of Jesus is pure love - love for His Father, and so doing His Father's will; and love for you, and so laying down His life for you. But this death and resurrection love of Jesus for you isn't just to show you true love and tell you to do the same (as if you could!), but to make your love right again. That your old self and wrong love be crucified with Christ, and a new man and right love be raised with Him. That's what happens in Holy Baptism. For in Holy Baptism, you are given a new King and a new kingdom. A new King and a new kingdom not of sin, but of love; not of death, but of life; not of worldly power, but of humble power.

*And what is that humble power for you and me? **It is to repent and to forgive.*** For what is more humble and loving? What is more powerful? What is more of God and Christ? What could look weaker to the world, yet be more powerful than all the power of the world?

That's why Jesus comes in humble power - to love and to forgive. From manger to donkey to cross to this altar today, He is here for this reason alone: to love you and to forgive you. And of this let there be no confusion. Whatever your sin, whatever you have been, whatever your pride and self-serving, however you have failed . . . **behold, your king is coming to you.** Not to condemn you, but to forgive you.

And the time is coming when Jesus will come no longer in humble power, but in His unveiled power. When He will come no longer riding on a donkey, no longer in bread and wine, but on the clouds of heaven, with all the host of heaven. But it will not be a different Jesus, but the same Jesus. The same Jesus who comes to serve you now; the same Jesus who loves and forgives you now; the same Jesus who you know now. And so there will be no confusion, only joy. The joy of His life. The joy of His salvation.

A joy not just for the future, but which is yours, even now. Like the joy of those pilgrims who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem that day. That is why we sing their song as Jesus comes to us in the same humble power today, "**Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!**" For joy cannot remain silent. And while the world may look at what we're doing here and say, "*Huh? What are you talking about?*" There's no one there - only some words and a few snacks . . . no, the King is here. In the humble power of His Word and of His Body and Blood. Descending to our depths to raise us to His heights. Coming to us in our darkness to enlighten us with His Word and Spirit. Taking our sin and death, and giving us His life.

Therefore let us rise to meet Him. Do not be deceived by the humble appearance. "**Behold, your king is coming to you.**" *Saviour of the Nations, come!*

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.